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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

## *The Old and New Testament Student*

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TEACHING presupposes study. There may be study that is not followed by teaching, but there can be no teaching that is not preceded by study. The teacher must be a student. The teacher of the Bible must be a student of the Bible. Not all study is study of books. One may teach farming having studied it only in the school of practice, or botany knowing only what he has himself observed. One may conceivably teach religion on the basis of experience only. But in every case he who teaches must first have studied what he is to teach. Our Sunday schools are generally held to be Bible schools. They teach the Bible with a distinctly religious motive. They teach religion; they even teach personal religion, and base such teaching on personal experience. Yet the Bible holds the central place in the teaching, and it is this which is supposed to form the subject-matter of instruction. The Sunday-school teacher must therefore be a student of the Bible. If, as there is reason to fear, many of our teachers have had no training in the study of the Bible and have no definite idea how to study it, there can be few duties more urgent or more important for the pastor or superintendent than the teaching of the teachers how to study.

What should be the aim of the Sunday-school teacher in his character as a student of the Bible? Specifically the answer depends on what part or phase of the Bible he is to teach.



SOME INHABITANTS OF GAZA

If biblical history, then he must study its history; if biblical ethics, then its ethics; if biblical theology, then its theology.

But all these answers are included in the one answer  
**STUDY OF THE** that his task as teacher is to teach the meaning of  
**BIBLE SEARCH** the Bible, and his task as a student is to find the  
**FOR ITS MEANING** meaning of the Bible. It is not a mistranslation,

or a misinterpretation, when the words which literally mean, "Go learn what this is, I will have mercy and not sacrifice," are rendered in our English Bible, "Go learn what this means." It was the meaning that Jesus wanted his hearers to find. The meaning of the Bible *is* the Bible. The student of the Bible must be first of all a searcher after the meaning of the Bible—in other words, an interpreter. His first task—his whole task strictly as a student of any book or passage—is the discovery of the meaning of that book or passage. Every apparatus or method which obscures from him this object or impedes his progress toward it is a hindrance to study.

But how can this object be attained? How can the student discover and rethink the thought which the writer of the book has expressed in the words which stand on the page? The method must be for all students fundamentally the same, but we have in mind here especially the Sunday-school teacher who brings to his study a fair degree of intelligence, but no special linguistic or exegetical training.

First of all let it be said that a great deal can be accomplished by simple *attention*, provided the aim to discover the meaning be clearly recognized. Nearly one-half  
**ATTENTION AND** of all our difficulty in the study of the Bible arises  
**PERCEPTION** from failing to recognize what such study is, failing clearly to define to ourselves that our first object must be the discovery of the meaning of what we are studying. And nearly one-half of the remainder arises from simple inattention, failure to perceive that which is before our eyes, and which requires no special exegetical apparatus to interpret. Attention will not accomplish everything. One sees only what he has eyes to see. Preëminently in this, too, the rule holds that to him that

hath shall be given. The more one knows already, the more one gains by each new act of attention. But, generally speaking, intelligent attention directed toward the end of gaining the meaning will disclose to the student many things that he had never perceived before. Moreover, it will show him that there are certain things that he does not understand, and will raise questions concerning the meaning which it will not itself answer. This is itself a great gain. To define the question that demands answer is to take one long step toward obtaining the answer.

Attention thus prepares the way for *investigation* and *acquisition*, i. e., for the search for information beyond that which the passage itself yields to the student's present powers of perception. The precise scope of such investigation and the line of division between attention and investigation will manifestly vary with the student

**INVESTIGATION  
AND ACQUISITION**

What one man perceives at a glance another must search out. The means of investigation available to one man may be wholly unknown or unusable to another. What can attention do, and what methods and instruments of investigation are available for the fairly intelligent student of the English Bible? A practical answer must distinguish two somewhat distinct fields of study.

It is a familiar thought today that the parts of any single book of the Bible are adequately understood only in the light of some knowledge of the whole. Some knowledge, we say, since, of course, perfect knowledge of the whole is in turn dependent on knowledge of the individual parts. The necessity of such knowledge of the whole varies greatly in different books, but exists in some degree in respect to all. It is greatly to be desired that every Sunday-school teacher should begin his teaching of lessons from any given book with some large knowledge of the book as a whole, of the circumstances that led to its being written, with the purpose of the author, with its general plan and structure. Such knowledge can usually be gained in large part from a careful study of the book itself, though it is frequently the case that

**APPLIED TO A  
WHOLE BOOK**

the evidence of the book is intelligible only to him who knows the history of the period, and, indeed, often reveals itself only to a somewhat highly trained power of "attention." These facts render such preliminary study peculiarly difficult. If, for lack of training in such work, the teacher is unequal to the task of discovering the evidence which is in the book itself, he will do well to call in the help of one who can show him what is there, making use of some good work on "introduction" or the articles in a dictionary of the Bible. Yet he will do better who learns to do this work for himself, using first attention and then investigation. Let him read the book through attentively to discover any evidences in it concerning its occasion and purpose, carefully noting all that he finds. Let him seek to find out its great divisions, if such there be, and make out a plan of the book. Then, when "attention" has done its perfect work, let him supplement this work by that of "investigation," following out historical references which are to him obscure, or other hints which may point to the occasion of the book, using for such purpose whatever trustworthy sources are accessible. Finally, he may supplement his own work by that which other students have found and published.

The same general method will apply to the study of a portion of a book assigned for a particular lesson. The general scope of the book being before his mind, the aim *APPLIED TO A SINGLE PASSAGE* of the teacher will be to find out as accurately as possible the exact thought expressed in the particular paragraph before him. And attention and investigation are the two processes by which he must work.

If any teacher who reads these pages has been perplexed and baffled in the attempt to study his Bible, we commend to him the experiment of sitting down to the study of the lesson without commentary, "quarterly," or other help, and, with a clear conception of his aim as a student, diligently setting himself to see what is before him. Let him ask himself the question: Do I understand the meaning of these successive words, as they were used by the writer? Do I know what he meant by the

individual sentences? Do I perceive the connection of thought, as it lay in his mind, between the successive sentences? Do I grasp the meaning of this whole paragraph? Let him treat the book, or the portion of the book, as he would treat a letter which he had just received, and whose meaning he was deeply desirous of understanding. In many cases we are sure he will be surprised at the results of this simple effort to see what is before his eyes.

If, when in any stage of the process attention has done its best, there still remain unanswered questions, or if there be any doubt what is the correct answer, recourse must be had to investigation. If the student is in doubt what a word or phrase meant in the mind of the writer, he must seek trustworthy information. If it is a single word, an English dictionary will perhaps define it. If it is a concrete term like "synagogue" or "Pharisee," an ordinary dictionary of the Bible will usually give the needed help. If it is one of the profounder terms of the biblical vocabulary, such as "righteousness," "grace," "eternal," or the terms that seem so simple in their literal sense, but which, when we come to ask for the thought for which they stand, are found to be so difficult of apprehension, such as "life," "light," "darkness," he may search in vain in the dictionary; for, unfortunately, there is as yet no adequate dictionary of biblical words for the English reader. In such case, then, he must resort to some other source. And here comes in the value of the commentary (the term being used to include the commentary portion of all the special lesson helps). Its proper function is not to save the student the trouble of giving attention, but, first of all, to answer the questions that attention has raised, but cannot answer. The question answered, the word defined by dictionary or by commentary, attention resumes its work to discover now, if possible, by help of this added information, more of the thought than was perceived before. If still there remain unanswered questions, or if new ones are now raised—for it is a secondary function of the commentary to raise questions that untrained attention fails to raise for lack of being intent enough—he must betake himself again to such

helps as are in his reach, always bringing, if possible, his question with him for answer; or, if he already have a provisional answer, comparing this with the answer of the student who wrote the commentary, and judging as wisely as possible which is the true answer. By such process as this, combining attention and investigation, seeking always the whole meaning of the passage, the whole thought of the writer, laying all trustworthy sources of help under contribution, but always making them serve him, not submitting himself to be led blindly by them, the student may come to such apprehension of the meaning of the Scripture as is possible to him.

Will these two processes of attention and investigation prepare the teacher to teach? Not necessarily. They will infallibly give him material for teaching. Often they will make the rest of the process very easy. But the Sunday-school teacher is not merely a teacher in the narrower sense of the term. He is also a preacher (as every good preacher is also a teacher); he is concerned, not simply with the presentation or impartation of truth, but has to do also with the application of it to his pupils, with its moral effect on their hearts and conduct. This means that the teacher, besides being an interpreter of the Bible, must be a student of humanity also, and likewise an orator, in the best sense of that term. It is our present aim only to point out that he must first of all be a student of the Bible, and to indicate in outline the methods of his interpretation. Of the other departments of his task we hope to speak later.

**AFTER INTERPRE-  
TATION, APPLI-  
CATION**